

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 299363

EXDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT HAVANA 0826 ACTION SECSTATE DEC 12

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 0826

EXDIS

EO 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MILI MARR XJ CU AO ET SO PINS

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE CUBAN COOPERATION IN REACHING NAMIBIA SETTLEMENT

REF: A) HAVANA 0702; B) STATE 281945

1. DR. CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ INVITED ME TO HIS OFFICE EARLY SATURDAY AFTERNOON, DECEMBER 10, TO GIVE ME THE GOC RESPONSE TO THE US PROPOSAL THAT WE INFORM SOUTH AFRICA OF CUBAN WILLINGNESS TO WITHDRAW ITS TROOPS FROM THE NAMIBIA BORDER IN CONTEXT OF A SETTLEMENT. (HE APOLOGIZED FOR THE DELAY IN GETTING BACK TO ME ON THIS DUE TO AN ILLNESS.) THE ANSWER WAS THAT THE MOST CUBA CONFIDENTIAL

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COULD DO - AND THEY HAVE ALREADY DONE IT, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF RAUL CASTRO'S VISIT TO LUANDA - WAS TO SEND TO NETO A FULL ACCOUNT OF OUR PROPOSAL AND OF MY CONVERSATION WITH RODRIGUEZ ABOUT IT (REFTEL A) FOR SUCH ACTION AS ANGOLA MAY DECIDE TO TAKE. RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT WHILE THE GOC HAD FORMALLY MADE NO RECOMMENDATION, THE CLEAR INTIMATION TO NETO WAS THAT CUBA SUPPORTED GIVING THE DESIRED ASSURANCES TO SOUTH AFRICA IF NETO IS DISPOSED TO DO SO. THUS THE BALL IS IN NETO'S COURT.

2. I ASKED WHETHER RODRIGUEZ HAD ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS TO MAKE

TO US WITH RESPECT TO RAUL CASTRO'S SPEECH IN LUANDA ON DEC 5 (HAVANA 0772) IN WHICH HE TOOK A HARD LINE WITH RESPECT TO CUBA'S PRESENCE IN ANGOLA AND RECENT USG CRITICISMS THEREOF. RODRIGUEZ REPLIED THAT HE HAD NOTHING TO ADD, AND THAT THERE WAS REALLY NOTHING NEW IN THE SPEECH REGARDING ANGOLA. HE QUICKLY AGREED WITH MY COMMENT THAT THE SPEECH DID NOT APPEAR TO PRECLUDE JOINING ANGOLAN-CUBAN DECISIONS IN THE FUTURE I.E., INDEPENDENT OF ANY "NEGOTIATIONS" WITH THE US - WHICH MIGHT AFFECT TROOP DEPLOYMENTS AND NUMBERS. I ASKED HIM IF THERE WAS ANYTHING NEW IN THAT REGARD WHICH HE COULD TELL ME (HOPING TO DRAW HIM OUT WITH REGARD TO REPORTS WE HAVE HEARD OF RECENT CUBAN WITHDRAWALS FROM CABINDA AREA), BUT HE OFFERED NOTHING.

3. RODRIGUEZ DID GO ON TO SAY THAT HE IS ENCOURAGED BY ANGOLA'S INCREASING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRENGTH, WHICH IF COUPLED WITH IMPROVEMENTS IN ITS EXTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION (FOR EXAMPLE, IN NAMIBIA) COULD PERMIT SOME FUTURE MOVEMENT (I.E., IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONVERSATION, CUBAN TROOP REDEPLOYMENTS AND EVEN WITHDRAWALS). IN THIS CONNECTION, HE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION THAT THE CONTACT GROUP IS CONTINUING ITS EFFORTS, AND HE SEEMED AT LEAST SLIGHTLY OPTIMISTIC THAT IT MAY BE SUCCESSFUL. ON THE OTHER HAND, WITH REGARD TO OTHER PARTS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, HE SAID HE WAS DISCOURAGED BY RHODESIA'S RECENT INCURSIONS AND VIOLENCE IN
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MOZAMBIQUE, AND TOLD ME THAT MACHEL HAD MADE AN IMPASSIONED PLEA FOR ADDITIONAL CUBAN HELP. REFERRING BACK TO HIS STATEMENT TO ME IN AN EARLIER CONVERSATION THAT CUBA HAD RESISTED MANY MORE SUCH APPEALS THAN IT HAS ATTENDED IN AFRICA, DESPITE ALLEGATIONS FROM THE UNITED STATES AND OTHERS, RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT THE GOC IS DOING ALL IT CAN TO COOL THIS SITUATION. HE ADDED THAT HE HOPES THE US AND UK CAN HELP BY CURBING SMITH.

4. WITH RESPECT TO THREAT FROM ZAIRE, RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT THE SITUATION IS MORE REASSURING. HE SAID THAT THE RECENT VISIT TO CUBA OF SPECIAL FRENCH EMISSARY PONIAWOSKI HAD BEEN HELPFUL IN THIS REGARD. (NOTE: LOCAL FRENCH EMBASSY TOLD US THAT FRENCH-SUPPORTED

INCURSIONS FROM ZAIRE WERE NOT DISCUSSED.) RODRIGUEZ ALSO TOLD ME CONFIDENTIALLY THAT CUBA HAD OFFERED AND PONIAWOSKI HAD ACCEPTED CUBAN EFFORTS TO ACT AS AN INTERMEDIARY WITH ALGERIA TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION IN THE SAHARA. (COMMENT: FRENCH EMBASSY MENTIONED CUBAN OFFER, BUT SAID PARIS TURNED IT DOWN, PREFERRING TO MAINTAIN DIRECT CONTACTS WITH ALGERIANS.) HERE RODRIGUEZ MADE THE POINT TO ME THAT CUBA DOES NOT OPPOSE THE PRESENCE IN A RESPONSIBLE ROLE OF FRENCH OR OTHER FOREIGN TROOPS IN AFRICA, AND OBJECTS TO THE COMPLAINTS OF OTHERS (I.E., THE US) AGAINST CUBA FOR ITS PRESENCE. (HE ALLUDED TO A RECENT STATEMENT BY SENATOR MCGOVERN WHICH APPARENTLY MADE SOMETHING LIKE THE SAME POINT.) (COMMENT RODRIGUEZ' MODERATE LINE ON A FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFRICA IS ALSO CONSISTENT WITH APPARENT CUBAN EFFORT NOTED BY ALGERIANS AND MOROCCANS HERE, TO LIMIT DAMAGE TO CUBA'S RELATIONS WITH

RABAT IN WAKE OF SAHARA QUARREL.)

5. ON THE SITUATION IN OGADEN, RODRIGUEZ APPEARED SOMEWHAT LESS CONCERNED THAT THE LAST TIME WE TALKED, ALTHOUGH HE SAID THAT IT WAS STILL GRAVE. H SUGGESTED THAT SIAD IS FACING INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS IN THE OGADEN FIGHTING, AND THAT HE IS FINDING SOME OF HIS PRINCIPAL BACKERS PREOCCUPIED ELSEWHERE WITH THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS.

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YM DR. RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT THE GOC IS DISTRESSED AT CONTINUING USG ATTACKS ON THE CUBAN POSITION IN AFRICA, INCLUDING RECENT STATEMENTS BY AMBASSADOR YOUNG, AND REPEATED HIS BELIEF THAT THEY REFLECT EITHER IGNORANCE OF THE TRUE SITUATION OR DELIBERATE MISREPRESENTATION FOR DOMESTIC US POLITICAL REASONS. I AGAIN ARGUED THAT THIS INTERPRETATION OVERLOOKED LONG-TIME USG CONCERN ABOUT THE CUBAN PRESENCE IN AFRICA, AND THE CLEAR PREOCCUPATION OF THE PRESIDENT AND OTHER SENIOR US OFFICIALS IN THE FACE OF CONTINUING REPORTS OF A SUBSTANTIAL CUBAN MILITARY BUILDUP IN ANGOLA AND ELSEWHERE. AT THIS JUNCTURE RODRIGUEZ RECALLED HIS EARLIER ASSURANCES TO ME THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO RECENT MILITARY INCREASES IN ANGOLA, AND DENIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN "SUBSTANTIAL" INCREASES ELSEWHERE IN AFRICCA. WHEN I THEN SAID THAT THE USG ALSO BELIEVED THAT CUBA WAS ACTING CONTRARY TO EARLIER INDICATIONS TO US THAT IT WOULD REDUCE ITS MILITARY PRESENCE IN ANGOLA, HE SAID THAT NO SUCH ASSURANCES WERE GIVEN (AS DISTINCT FROM UNILATERAL CUBAN PROJECTIONS THAT WITHDRAWALS WOULD RESUME WHEN EVOLVING SITUATION PERMITTED).

7. AT THE CLOSE OF THE CONVERSATION I SAID THAT I HAD EXPECTED NEW INFORMATION AND POSSIBLE INSTRUCTIONS FROM WASHINGTON WHICH HAD NOT ARRIVED IN TIME FOR OUR MEETING, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF TRANSMISSION DIFFICULTIES. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER I MIGHT SEE HIM AGAIN IF THERE WERE IMPORTANT NEW POINTS TO RAISE, RODRIGUEZ TOLD ME THAT I WOULD HAVE TO TAKE THEM TO MINREX SINCE HE IS LEAVING IMMEDIATELY FOR A TRIP TO MADRID AND THE MIDDLE EAST. HE GAVE ME NO FURTHER DETAILS. (COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND THAT SPANISH-CUBAN COMMERCIAL TALKS RECENTLY FALTERED, BECAUSE OF SPAIN'S UNWILLINGNESS TO PURCHASE CUBAN SUGAR NEXT YEAR.)

8. COMMENT: WHILE NOT FULLY RESPONSE TO OUR SPECIFIC PROPOSAL ON NAMIBIA, THE GOC WAS NOT FLATLY NEGATIVE, AND MAY INDEED HAVE HELPED PAVE THE WAY TO A COOPERATIVE RESPONSE FROM NETO TO ANY
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CONCRETE ARRANGEMENT THE CONTACT GROUP MAY COME UP WITH ON THE BORDER, INCLUDING MUTUAL TROOP WITHDRAWALS. AS FOR THE REST, THE CUBANS, IN THE PERSON OF ROFRIGUEZ AT LEAST, SEEM STILL TO BE WILLING TO ENGAGE IN A DIALOGUE WITH US ON AFRICA, ALTHOUGH OSTEN-

SIBLY STILL UNHAPPY AND PERPLEXED ABOUT THE MOTIVES BEHIND MOST
RECENT USG PUBLIC CRITICISM GIVEN ALSO SOME FURTHER MOVEMENT ON
POLITICAL PRISONERS AND AMCIT REPATRIATION QUESTIONS (HAVANA 721)
IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE GOC HOPES THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS WILL
NOT BE DERAILED BY OUR DIFFERENCES ON AFRICA. IT IS NOT, HOWEVER,
PREPARED AT THIS TIME TO TAKE MAJOR STEPS TOWARD NARROWING THOSE
DIFFERENCES. LANE. UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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